

B-4484

BROOKS PRICE BUICK SHOWROOM/ZELL MOTOR CAR COMPANY

BALTIMORE CITY, MD

This site contains two buildings: a circa 1914-28 auto service building and a 1930s Art Deco showroom. The showroom faces North Avenue and is a blonde brick, two-story structure with ziggurat-shaped glass bricks above the entrance. The rear of the showroom takes on a completely different character and is a typical concrete-framed warehouse of the period. The other, older structure on the property is much more utilitarian, and no longer features the wooden, automobile garages which originally lined its perimeter walls. Private access.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Brooks Price Buick Showroom/Zell Motor Car Building

other names/site number Greenwood Towing & Greenwood Recovery/ B-4484

2. Location

street & number 1370 North Ave.

not for publication

city or town Baltimore

vicinity N/A

state Maryland

code MD

county

Baltimore City

code 510

zip code 21217

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

N/A

4. National Park Service Certification

N/A

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

2

Noncontributing

buildings

sites

structures

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form
(Brooks Price Buick Showroom)
(Baltimore City, MD)

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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE

Sub: specialty store

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE

Sub: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

roof

walls BRICK

other STONE

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance See continuation sheet.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce
Architecture

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Period of Significance c. 1914-1940

Significant Dates 1914-28
1930

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) See continuation sheet.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Maps

Bromley, G.W. and Co. Atlas of the City of Baltimore, Vol. 1. Philadelphia: 1885, 1896.

Hopkins, G.M. Map of the City of Baltimore, Maryland. 1876, 1877.

Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps, Baltimore, Maryland, Vols. 2,3, and 7. New York: 1890, 1901, 1914, 1928.

Simmons, Isaac. 1852 Revision of the Thomas H. Poppleton Map. Baltimore: 1852.

Interview, July 1992, with Burton E. Greenwood Sr., Greenwood Towing.

Liebs, Chester H. Main Street to Miracle Mile. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property

SDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form
(Brooks Price Buick Showroom)
(Baltimore City, MD)

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UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | — | — | — | 3 | — | — | — |
| 2 | — | — | — | 4 | — | — | — |

— See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries incorporate both the Brooks Price Showroom and rear warehouse space and the former Zell Motor Car Company building, now owned by Greenwood Towing and used for storage. See attached Baltimore City map.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth Jo Lampl & Kay Fanning/Architectural Historians
organization Robinson & Associates date July 1992
street & number 1710 Connecticut Ave., NW telephone (202) 234-2333
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20009

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____
street&number _____ telephone _____
city or town Baltimore state MD zip code _____

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 5 & 6 Page 1

Brooks Price Buick Showroom/Zell
Motor Car Building
name of property
Baltimore City, Maryland
county and State

HISTORIC CONTEXT

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization: Piedmont

Chronological/Developmental Period(s): Industrial/Urban Dominance;
Modern Period

Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme(s): Transportation; Architecture,
Landscape Architecture, and Community Planning

Resource Type:

Category: building(s)

Historic Environment: urban

Historic Function(s) and Use(s): commerce/trade

Known Design Source: none

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Brooks Price Buick Showroom
name of property
Baltimore City, Maryland
county and StateDESCRIPTION

This seemingly small, two-story, three-bay Art Deco commercial building was constructed in the late 1930s, and is a deceptively large structure. The pie-shaped building opens onto Whitelock Street to form a large warehouse.

The facade of the building has blond brick screen walls and stone detailing. The bays are defined by molded brick piers with setbacks, creating the jagged, ziggurat-style silhouette that is a hallmark of early Art Deco. The parapets are topped by striated or channeled stone blocks. The side bays have large window openings, containing recent plate glass on the first floor and original, multi-paned industrial sash on the second. Three bands of simple brick beltcourses run across the wall surfaces at the cornice level.

The entrance is in the center bay. Above it is a large window of glass block divided by a vertical brick mullion and composed in a ziggurat fashion. Above this glass-block centerpiece is a parapet, stepped in profile and heavily molded.

The interior had a vestibule 16 feet deep, and the vestibule and/or auditorium was decorated in colors of ivory and sky blue. The present condition of the interior is not known.

The warehouse portion of the building is a large concrete-framed, flat-roofed brick building with multi-paned industrial sash windows. It now houses the Car & Truck Auction of Maryland, Inc., owned by the Greenwood Towing concern.

Finally, a second building is considered contributing to this architectural complex, despite the loss of some of its original fabric. The original Zell Motor Car Company Auto Service and Repair building sits at the southeastern portion of the lot along Whitelock Street. It is a flat-roofed brick building with a central round-arched entrance. The original wooden auto garage stalls, which used to line the perimeter of the building and the area just abutting Greenwood Towing, have been demolished. A closer investigation of this building's integrity should be undertaken.

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 1

Brooks Price Buick Showroom
name of property
Baltimore City, Maryland
county and StateSIGNIFICANCE

This c. 1937-39 Art Deco building was constructed to house the Brooks Price Buick Dealership and represents the presence of the automobile sales and service industry along the North Avenue corridor, especially at its intersection with Charles Street. The building, which first advertised the 1939 Buick, is a fine example of an Art Deco showroom of the post-Depression era, which stressed modernity of design but moderation in scale.

Actually, the building is much more than a showroom, being a deceptively large structure which stretches in a pie-shaped mass filling the entire block from south to north to encompass a much larger and more industrial, four-story portion equipped originally to handle storage, repair, and, perhaps, functional assembly.

The overall character of both the showroom and the service portion of the building are in a broad sense derived from the work of Albert Kahn, known for his large, fireproof structures for the automobile industry. The showroom's architectural character is part of the legacy of Art Deco automobile showrooms which evolved from Kahn's prototype for General Motors at the 1933 Century Of Progress Exhibition in Chicago. (See attached.) The general character of the rear portion of the building is more in the tradition of Kahn's industrial automobile assembly plants.

The Brooks Price Buick building is not the first automobile-related structure on the block. It sits immediately to the west of an earlier automobile company building, The Zell Motor Car Company. Zell sold and serviced Packards. Its showroom was located at 11 East Mountroyal Avenue (today, an office building). Zell Company servicing was offered out of this North Avenue block beginning c. 1901-14 and lasted until Packard stopped making cars in approximately the mid-1950s. The Zell Motor Company's service building, an L-shaped structure of roughly 22,000-24,000 square feet now houses part of Greenwood Towing Company's operations. Zell would transport its automobiles over from its sales office to this North Avenue service center. Cars would enter the premises from North Avenue (just east of the Buick Dealership) through a wide driveway. The driveway was marked by a canopy-like structure, made of masonry walls and roof. Through

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 2

Brooks Price Buick Showroom
name of property
Baltimore City, Maryland
county and State

the canopy, cars would be taken to the service building, which had wooden automobile service bays around the circumference of a general repair area. The company could service up to 60 cars. Although the wooden bays were undoubtedly meant for storage of cars, they were most often used as storage bays. They lined the perimeter of the service building and occupied an area just to the west of the driveway, adjacent to the Buick Dealership. These garages are described as having been constructed of brick piers and wooden doors. They were demolished by Greenwood Towing many years ago.

The buick building represents a slightly later era of Baltimore's automobile history. In the late 1930s/early 1940s, the North Avenue/Charles Street intersection was the hub of automobile life in the city. At that time, Backus Ford, Weiss Ford, Chesapeake Cadillac, and Oriole Pontiac all were located near the intersection. The Equitable National Bank (now the Maryland National Bank), located at the corner of North and Charles, was then one of the busiest banks in the state, offering many loans to commercial enterprises. In addition, there were a number of automobile repair shops on North Avenue, just after the North Avenue Bridge.

The showrooms in the area profited from the abundance of wealthy homeowners who lived along the Madison Avenue/Eutaw Place corridor and to the north of the city along Druid Hill Park.

This Buick building may have been the work of an architect working in isolation, or may have been influenced by a Buick Company manual. The building was designed as a four-story structure (although it appears as two from W. North Avenue) with the capacity to grow. A relatively recent engineering investigation into its foundation revealed that the building was designed to carry a load which could include up to nine additional stories. Typical of the time, many car manufacturers published manuals on how to design automobile showrooms. It was not uncommon to suggest buildings which resembled service stations, and to suggest later additions to an originally thrifty building project:

One panacea widely touted in these paper object lesson, and adopted by some dealers who could afford it, was

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National Park ServiceNATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 3

Brooks Price Buick Showroom
name of property
Baltimore City, Maryland
county and State

to relocate on a large lot farther out of town, put an an oversize rendition of one of the modern gasoline service stations that were springing up everywhere, and wait to add on more space if the economy improved.¹⁶

The original owners, Brooks Price Buick, were one of two Buick Dealerships in town. The other, Kelly Buick, was located across the street from the Zell Motor Car Company on Mountroyal Avenue (today, its building is owned by the University of Baltimore) in a more traditional brick structure. In 1960, Bill Biddorf bought the building from Brill Price in order to operate a Ford Showroom. Brooks Price Buick moved first to Reiserstown, and eventually to Towson, where it still operates today as Brooks Buick/BMW. Biddorf's Ford operation was not successful because the other Ford dealerships in the area made it impossible for Biddorf to penetrate the market. Biddorf was forced to leased the building in the mid-1960s to an automobile trade school, which received funds from the federal government. When the government funds were denied, Biddorf split the building up into leasable space, offering the basement to a body shop operation.

In 1969, Greenwood Towing, a business started in 1925 on Howard Street, purchased the building from Bill Biddorf. Greenwood Towing was familiar with the building, having towed cars to both the Buick and Packard operations for many years. The building today is operated by Burton E. Greenwood, Sr., the son of the original owner. The towing company has always served as a wholesale towing operation, working for insurance companies, car dealerships, and other private property owners. Greenwood Towing today owns all the land that and improvements that formerly belonged to Buick and Zell Motor Car Company.

¹⁶ Chester H. Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile, Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1985, p. 86.

SANDTOWN-WINCHESTER/PENN-NORTH
RECONNAISSANCE-LEVEL SURVEY FORM

Survey No. B-4484

Neg. No. 7/29

Historic Name _____

Current Name/Use Greenwood Towing/Car & Truck Auction of Maryland, Inc.

Address(es) Whitelock, between Woodbrook and Druid Hill Avenue (rear elevation)

Resource/Property Type

☐ Rowhouses
☒ Commercial Structure
☐ Public/Institutional Building
☐ Public Housing
☐ Site
☐ Other

☐ Attached

☒ Freestanding

Note: _____

Stories 2

Primary Material concrete Secondary Material brick

Roof Form flat

No. of Bays in Unit/Facade _____ If Rowhouse: ☐ Flat Front ☐ Swell Front ☐ Porch

Window Type: ☐ Double-Hung ☐ Single-Leaf
☐ 1/1 Sash ☐ Double-Leaf
☐ 2/2 Sash ☐ Number of panels (if visible)
☐ 2/1 Sash ☐ Transom
☒ Other Sash
☐ Transom

Architectural Style Commercial Warehouse Date c. post-1928

Noteworthy Features: Rear portion of Deco Showroom. Warehouse with concrete frame, infill panels of brick, and industrial windows. Behind chain-link and barbed-wire fence. Large parking lot.

Alterations: ☐ Formstone ☐ Stucco
☐ Vinyl/Aluminum ☐ Window/Door Changes
☐ Awnings ☐ Missing Cornice Elements
☐ First-Floor Use Change ☐ Other: _____

Status: ☒ Occupied ☐ Vacant ☐ Mixed

NR Evaluation: ☒ Contributing ☐ Non-Contributing

Recommended for Intensive Level: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Surveyor: Joey Lampl

Affiliation: Robinson & Associates

Date: February-April 1992

SANDTOWN-WINCHESTER/PENN-NORTH
RECONNAISSANCE-LEVEL SURVEY FORM

Survey No. B-4484

Neg. No. 7/30

Historic Name Zell Motor Car Co. (auto service & repair)

Current Name/Use Greenwood Towing/Car & Truck Auction of MD, Inc. (?)

Address(es) Whitelock, between Woodbrook & Druid Hill Avenue (1300 Block?)

Resource/Property Type

☐ Rowhouses
☒ Commercial Structure
☐ Public/Institutional Building
☐ Public Housing
☐ Site
☐ Other

☐ Attached

☒ Freestanding

Note: _____

Stories 1

Primary Material brick Secondary Material _____

Roof Form flat

No. of Bays in Unit/Facade 3 If Rowhouse: ☐ Flat Front ☐ Swell Front ☐ Porch

Window Type: ☐ Double-Hung

☐ 1/1 Sash

☐ 2/2 Sash

☐ 2/1 Sash

☐ Other Sash

☐ Transom

Door Type:

☐ Single-Leaf

☐ Double-Leaf

☐ Number of panels (if visible)

☐ Transom

Architectural Style Commercial, Utilitarian Date c. 1914-28

Noteworthy Features: This is former Zell Motor Car Company auto repair shop. Wooden auto garage which used to line perimeter of building, now demolished. Large arched doorway, glass in tympanum. Fixed window with hopper and multiple lights to either side of door.

Alterations:

☐ Formstone

☐ Vinyl/Aluminum

☐ Awnings

☐ First-Floor Use Change

☐ Stucco

☒ Window/Door Changes

☐ Missing Cornice Elements

☒ Other: Auto bays altered

Status: ☒ Occupied ☐ Vacant ☐ Mixed

NR Evaluation: ☒ Contributing ☐ Non-Contributing

Recommended for Intensive Level: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Surveyor: Joey Lampl

Affiliation: Robinson & Associates

Date: February-April 1992

SANDTOWN-WINCHESTER/PENN-NORTH
RECONNAISSANCE-LEVEL SURVEY FORM

Survey No. B-4484

Neg. No. 8/14

Historic Name Brooks Price Buick Showroom/Zell Motor Car Building
Current Name/Use Greenwood Towing, Inc & Greenwood Recovery, Inc.
Address(es) 1370 North Avenue

Resource/Property Type

☐ Rowhouses
☒ Commercial Structure
☐ Public/Institutional Building
☐ Public Housing
☐ Site
☐ Other

☐ Attached
☒ Freestanding

Note: _____

Stories 2

Primary Material blonde brick Secondary Material stone trim

Roof Form flat

No. of Bays in Unit/Facade 3 If Rowhouse: ☐ Flat Front ☐ Swell Front ☐ Porch

Window Type: ☐ Double-Hung ☐ Single-Leaf
☐ 1/1 Sash ☒ Double-Leaf
☐ 2/2 Sash ☐ Number of panels (if visible)
☐ 2/1 Sash ☐ Transom
☐ Other Sash
☐ Transom

Architectural Style Art Deco Date c. 1930s

Noteworthy Features: Molded brick piers frame bays. Plate glass-windows on first floor, large multi-paned glass on second. Entrance in center bay, glass-block window with stepped profile above, parapet roof with molding. Brick beltcourses at cornice.

Alterations: ☐ Formstone ☐ Stucco
☐ Vinyl/Aluminum ☒ Window/Door Changes
☐ Awnings ☐ Missing Cornice Elements
☐ First-Floor Use Change ☐ Other: _____

Status: ☒ Occupied ☐ Vacant ☐ Mixed

NR Evaluation: ☒ Contributing ☐ Non-Contributing

Recommended for Intensive Level: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Surveyor: Joey Lampl
Date: February-April 1992

Affiliation: Robinson & Associates

B-4484

A & P CARNIVAL

(At left)

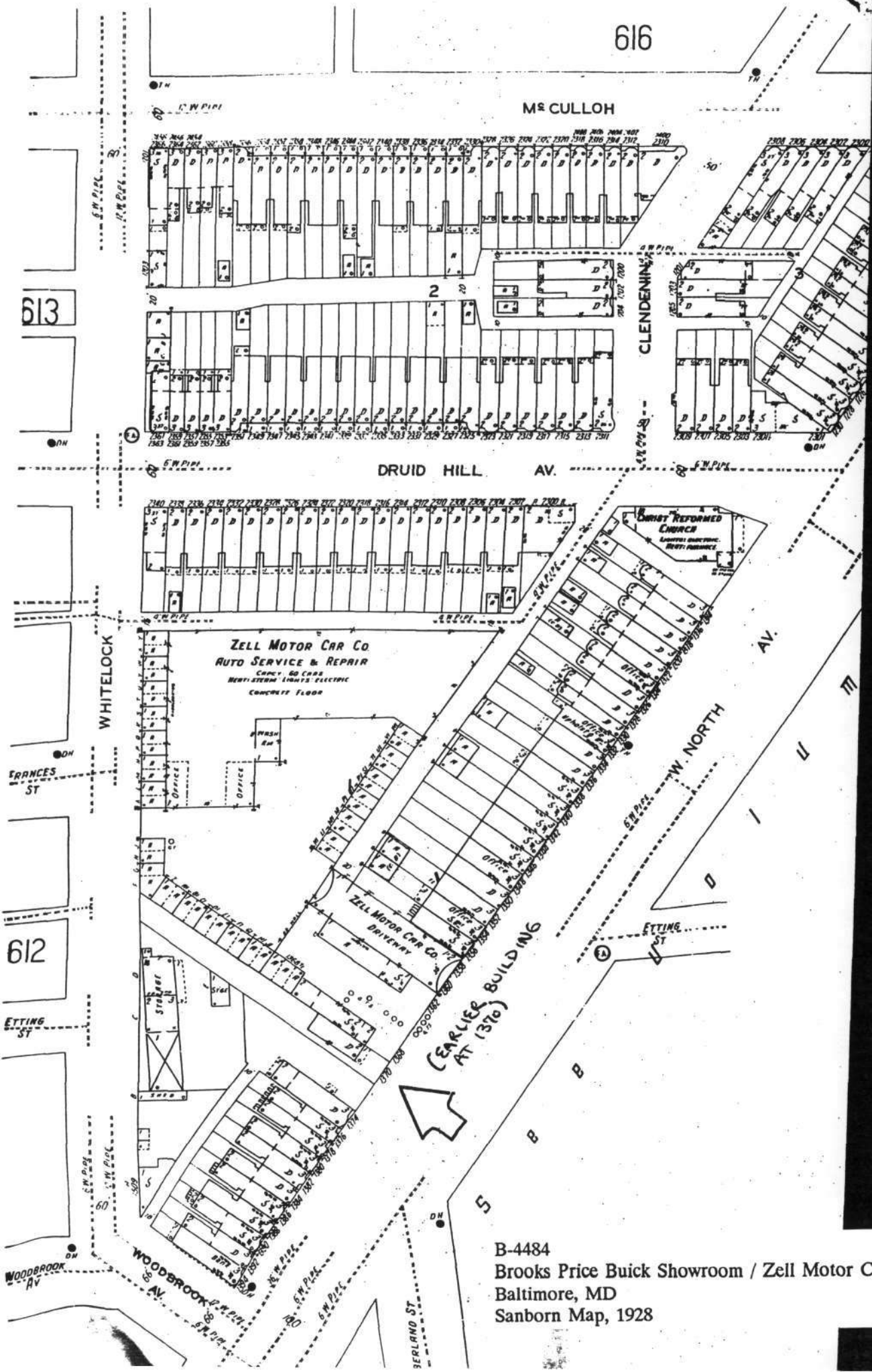
One of the most popular places at A Century of Progress, and attended daily by thousands, the A & P Carnival is a centre of attraction. In its amphitheatre one may sit in the open air and enjoy a show, watch Tony Sarg's marionettes perform and listen to the A & P Gypsies broadcast. If the weather is bad, the audience goes to the tent-covered section, the stage revolves, and the show proceeds.

GENERAL MOTORS BUILDING

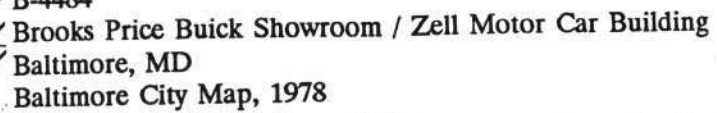
(At right)

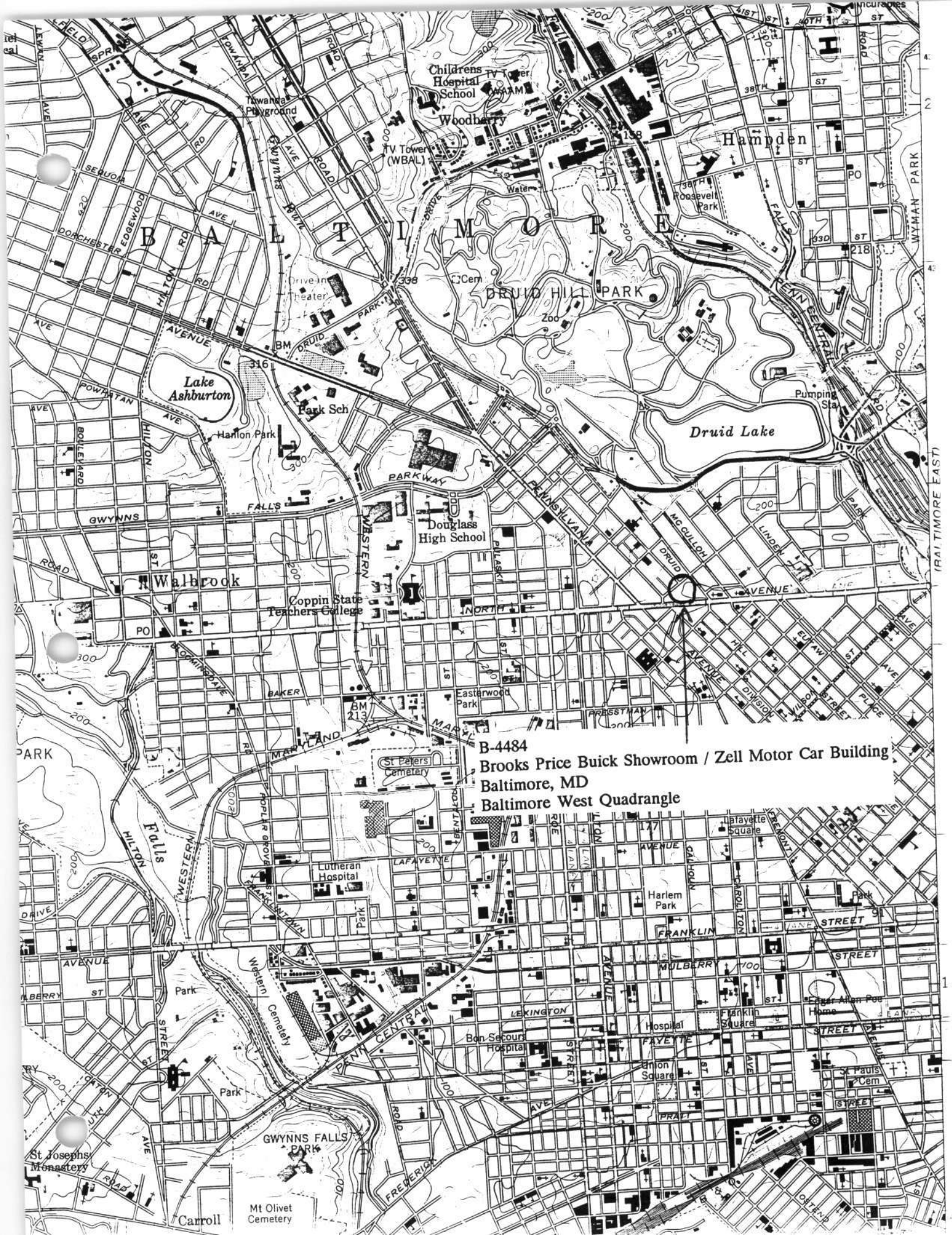
This building, the largest erected by a single exhibitor, is 450 feet long, 306 feet wide, and a tower 173 feet high. All of the numerous products of the General Motors Corporation are exhibited. A complete automobile assembly plant is in operation. Here may be seen each step in the production of an automobile, until the car moves under its own power.





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 Brooks Price Buick Showroom / Zell Motor Car Building
 Baltimore, MD
 Sanborn Map, 1928





B-4484
Brooks Price Buick Showroom / Zell Motor Car Building
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore West Quadrangle



SANDTOWN - WINCHESTER / PENN. NORTH

#B-4484

BALTIMORE, MD

ELIZABETH 90 LAMPL

MARCH 1992

CITY OF BALTIMORE, COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

HISTORIC: 2000 KODAK CAR CO (AUTO SERVICE & REPAIR)

CURRENT: CAR & TRUCK AUCTION OF MD, INC. (?)

VIEW FACING SOUTHEAST

ROLL 7/NEG 30

1 of 4

WHITELOCK BETWEEN
WOODBROOK & DRUID HILL AVE.



Sandtown-Windchester/Penn-North

#B-4484

Baltimore, MD

Leonard Jackson

July 1992

City of Baltimore, Commission for Historical and Architectural
Preservation

Historic: Brooks Price Buick Showroom/Zell Motor Car Building

Current: Greenwood Towing, Inc. & Greenwood Recovery, Inc.

1370 North Avenue

SOUTH ELEVATION

Roll 10/ Neg 14

2 of 4



SANDTOWN - WINCHESTER / PENN-NORTH

B-44B4

BALTIMORE, MD

ELIZABETH AO LAMPL

MARCH 1992

CITY OF BALTIMORE, COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

GREENWOOD TOWING, INC.

1370 NORTH AVENUE

SOUTH ELEVATION

ROLL 8 / NEG 14

3 of 4



SANDTOWN-WINCHESTER / PENN-NORTH

#B-4484

BALTIMORE, MD

ELIZABETH QO LAMPL

MARCH 1992

CITY OF BALTIMORE, COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

HISTORIC: BROOKS PRICE BUILT WAREHOUSE / STORAGE

CURRENT: CAR & TRUCK AUCTION OF MARYLAND, INC.

VIEW FACING SOUTH

ROLL 7 / NEG 29

WHITELOCK, BETWEEN WINDYBROOK
AND BROID HILL AVE.

4 of 4